DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 258 RC 015 811

AUTHOR	Manning, Thomas; Krecht, Elizabeth
TITLE	The Whale House of the Chilkat: Community House of the Gaanaxteidi Clan of Klukwan, Alaska.
INSTITUTION	Alaska State Museum, Juneau.
PUB DATE	85
NOTE	47p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly.
AVAILABLE FROM	Alaska State Museum Shop, Box FM, Juneau, AK 99811, ($8.00).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Alaska Natives; American Indian Culture; American Indians; *American Indian Studies; *Architectural Character; Cultural Influences; Elementary Secondary Education; *Home Furnishings; *Housing; Models; *Resource Units; Tribes
IDENTIFIERS	Alaska; Floor Plans; *Tlingit (Tribe)

ABSTRACT

This collection of photographic plates and drawings provides a visual record of a communal house of the Chilkat clan of southeast Alaska's Tlingit Tribe. The packet contains written descriptions of the history, interior design, living arrangements, and decorations of the Whale House. These illustrations of traditional Tlingit art and architecture are based on Lt. George T. Emmon's description of the interior of the Whale House in 1885. Also shown in the drawings are examples of household activities and conditions typical at that time. Interior features described and/or illustrated are the "Rain Screen," "Raven Post," "Woodworm Post," "Black Skin Post," and "Sea Creature Post." Six examples of clan crest designs representing the raven, eagle, wolf, killer whale, frog, and bear are included with brief descriptions of the important characteristics usually incorporated in their design. (NEC)

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The Whale House of the Chilkat

Community House of the Gaanaxteidí Clan of Klukwan, Alaska

Model based on the 1916 study by George T. Emmons

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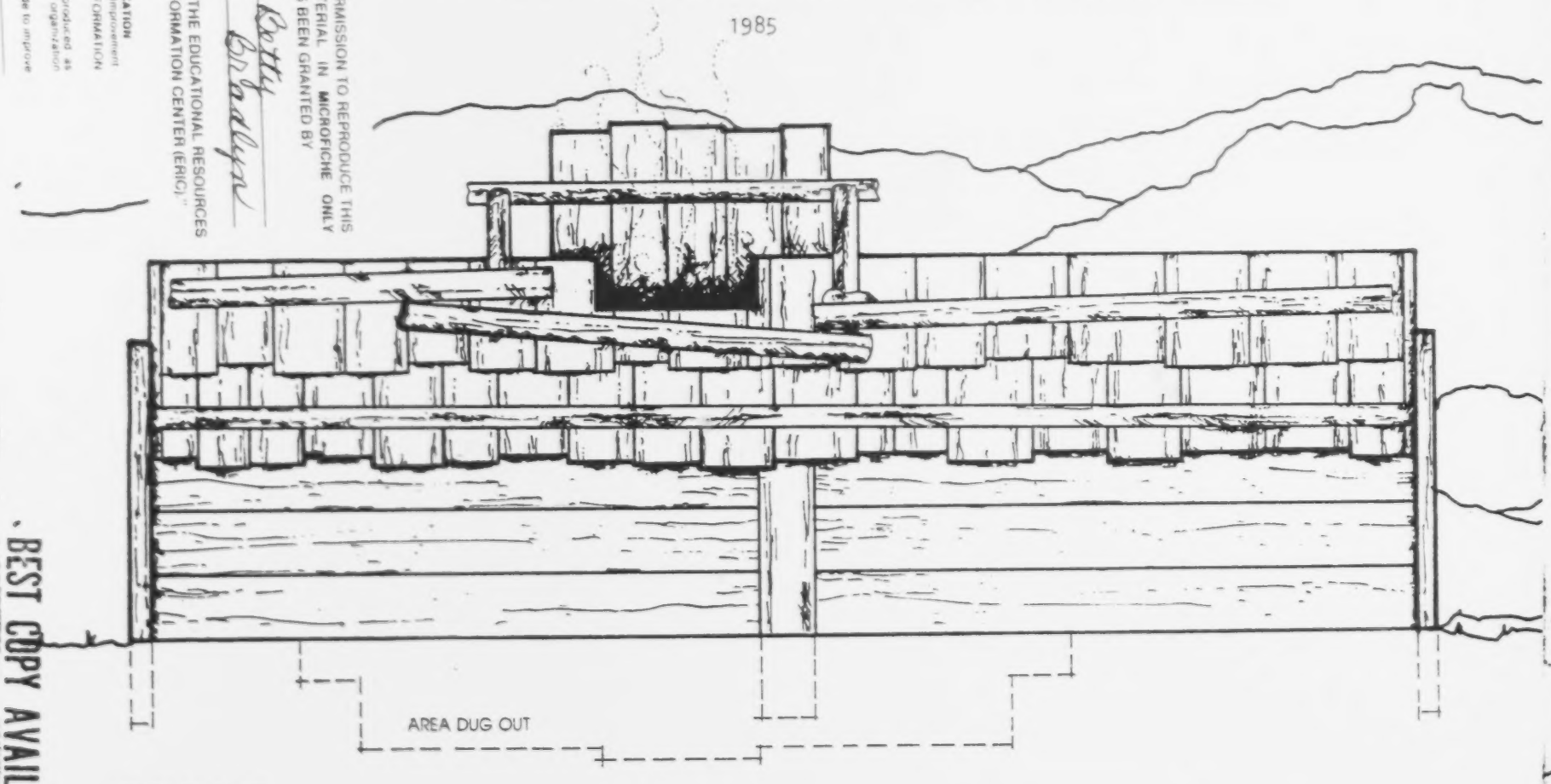

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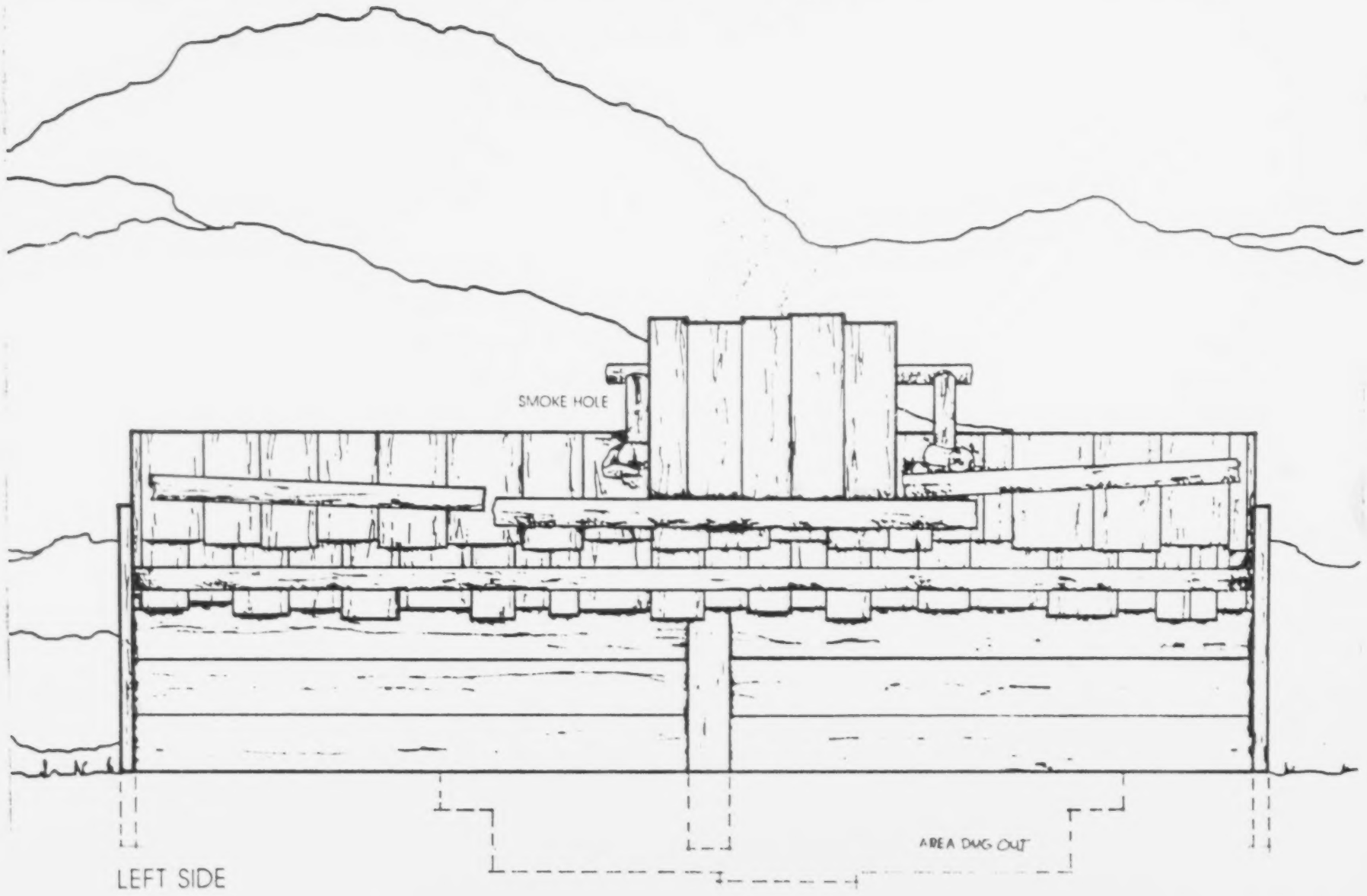

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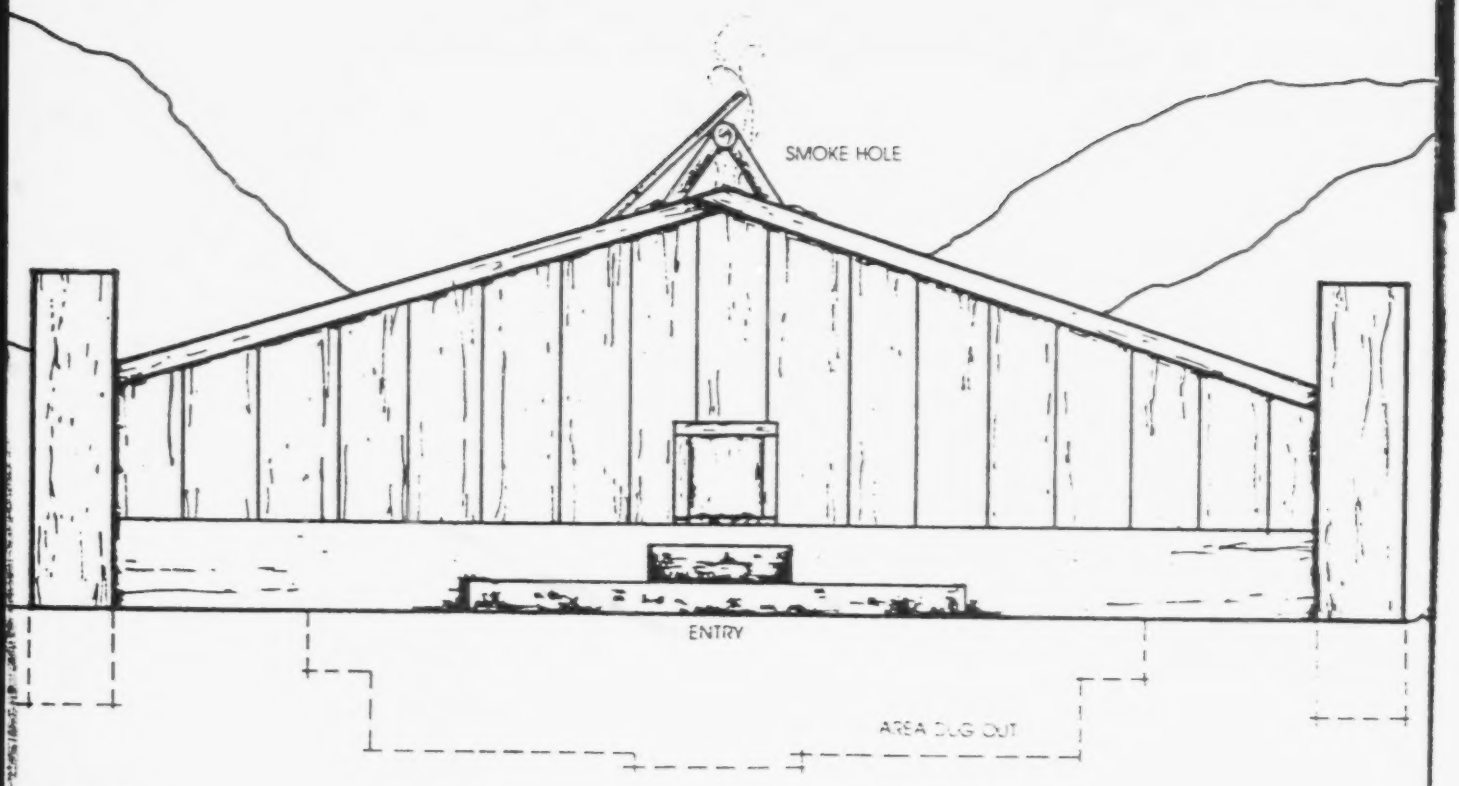

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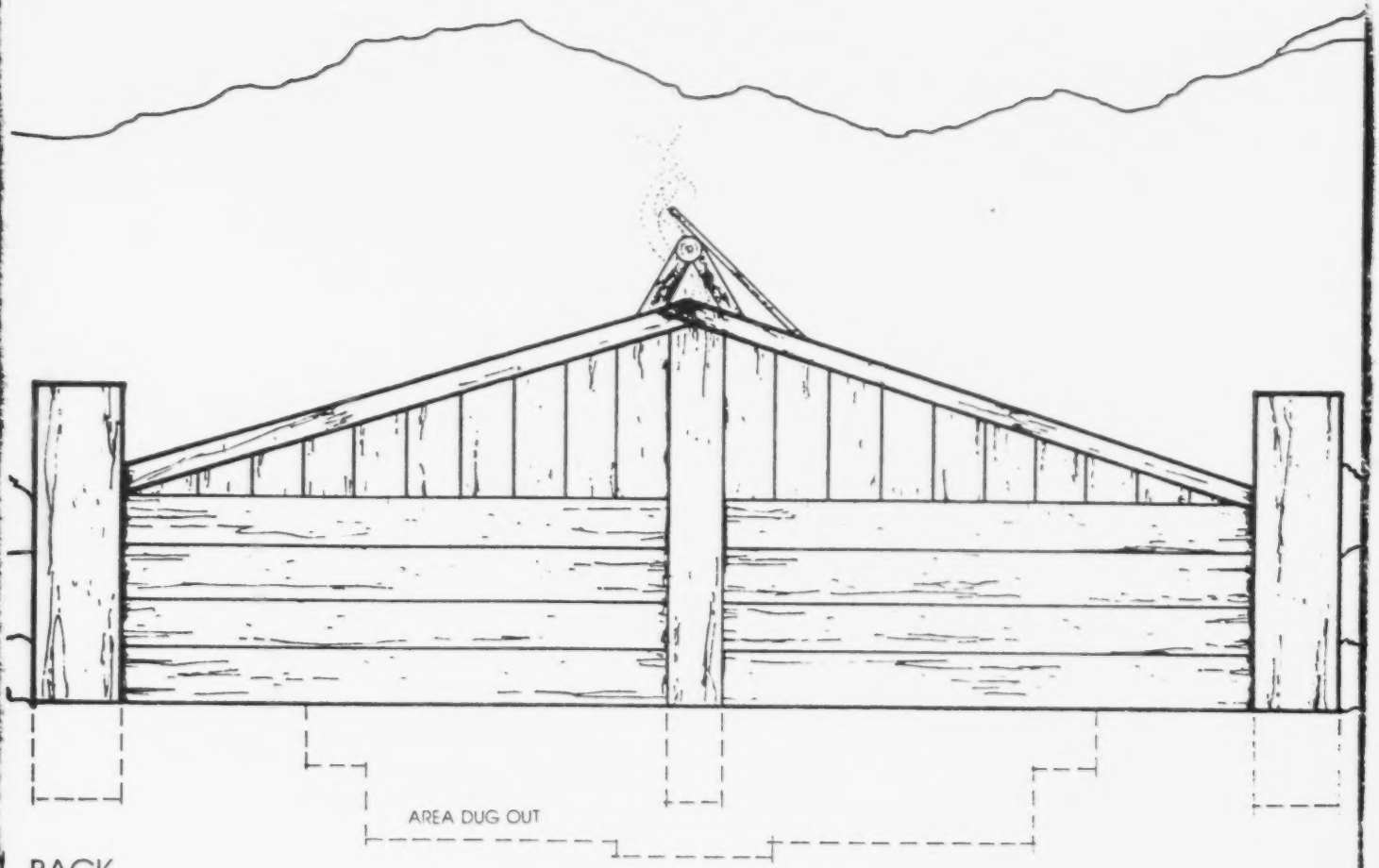

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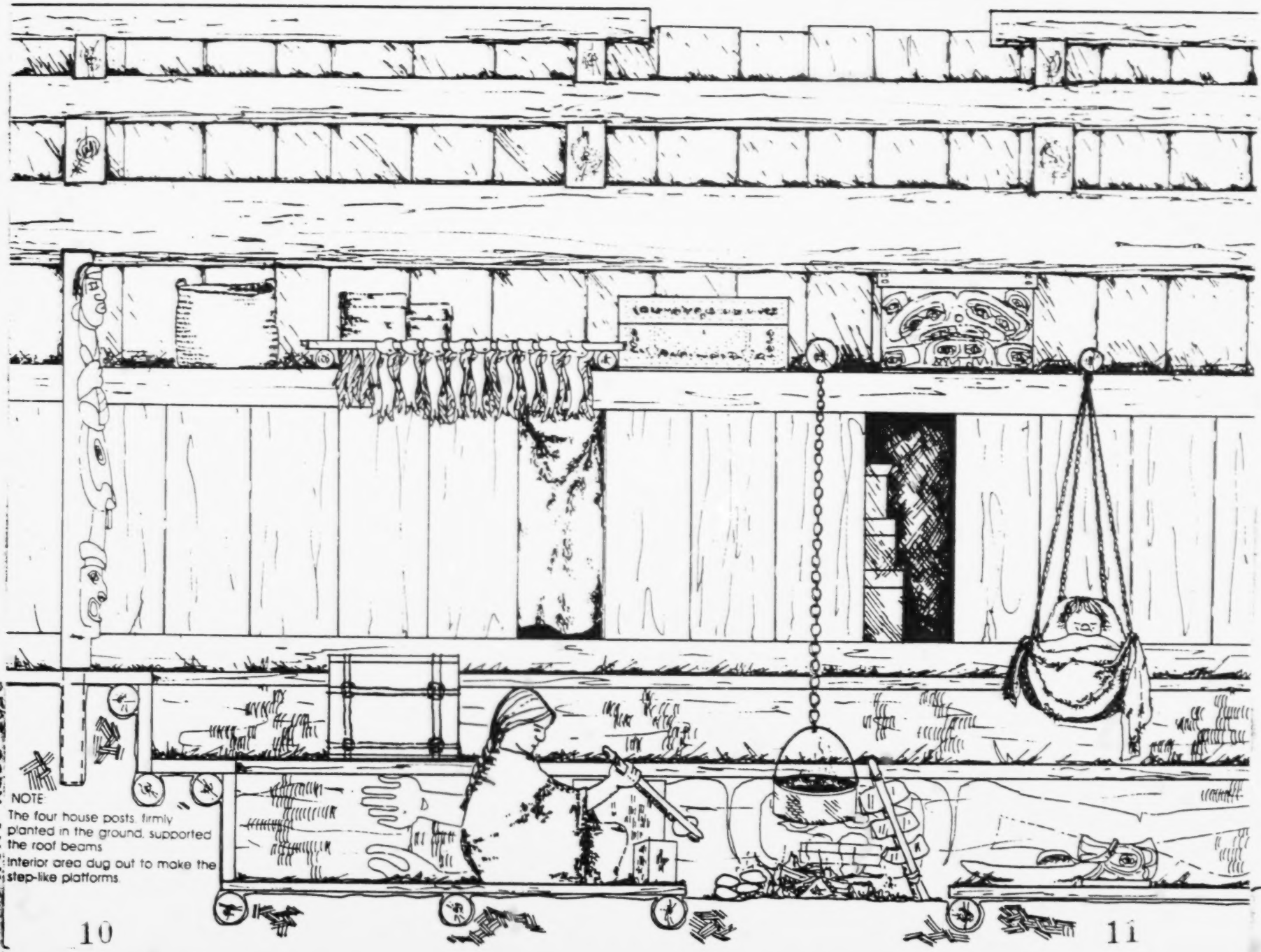

NOTE:
The four house posts, firmly planted in the ground, supported the roof beams.
Interior area dug out to make the step-like platforms.

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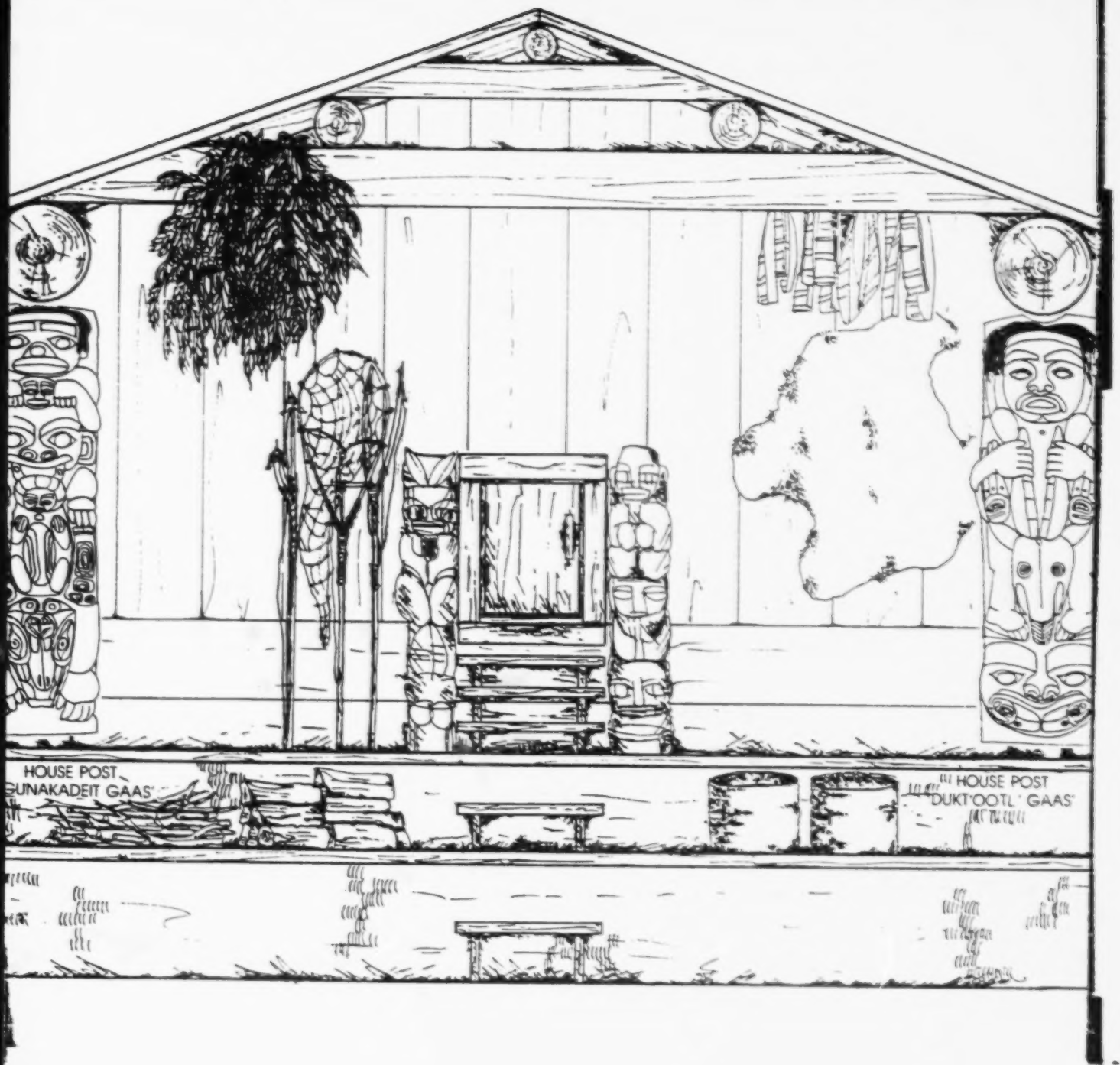

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INTERIOR DETAIL

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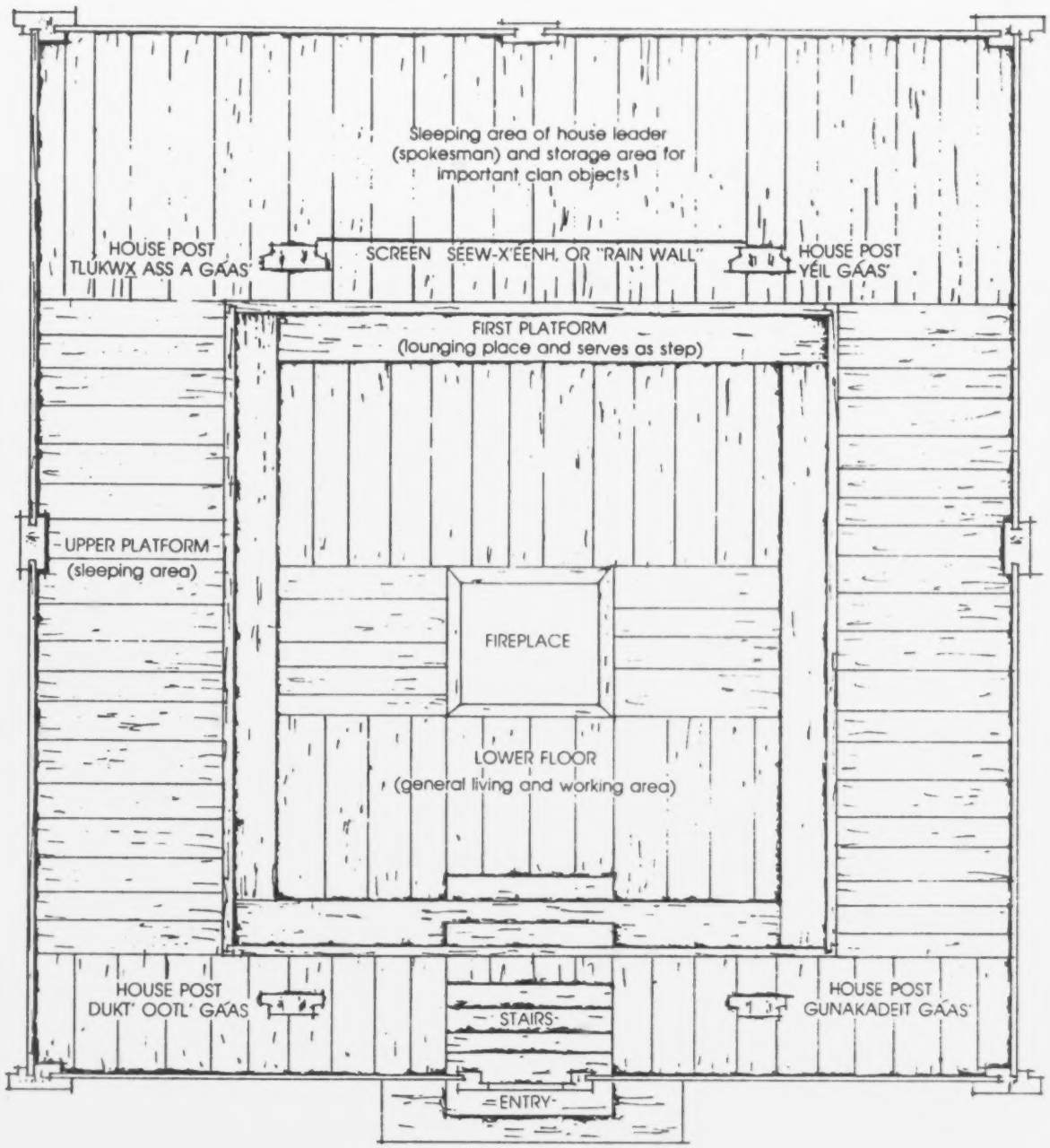
FLOOR PLAN



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Photography Credits:
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Transliteration by:
Nora and Richard Dauenhauer of the Sealaska Heritage Foundation

Funded in part by the Friends of the Alaska State Museum

The following excerpts are taken from The Whale House of the Chilkat *written by Lt. George T. Emmons and published in 1916 by the American Museum of Natural History.*

Lt. Emmons spent over sixty years collecting, recording and preserving examples of the traditional native cultures of Southeast Alaska. His study of the Chilkat Whale House began in 1882 when he first visited Klukwan and continued through twenty five years of close personal association with the Chilkat Tlingits. In this paper, Emmons has recorded an accurate, detailed description of one of the best examples of traditional Tlingit art and architecture.

The Whale House of the Chilkat

by
George T. Emmons (1916)

Introduction

Upon the discovery of the Northwest Coast of America, the Tlingit were found in possession of Southeastern Alaska with possibly the exception of the southernmost portion of Prince of Wales Island, which had been wrested from them by the invading Haida from Masset on the Queen Charlotte Island during the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The social organization of the Tlingit is founded on matriarchy and is dependent upon two exogamic parties (Raven and Wolf), the members of which intermarry and supplement each other upon the many ceremonial occasions which mark their intercourse.

The two parties are subdivided into fifty-six existing consanguineal families or clans, and the names of some others now extinct are remembered. Each of these, while retaining its phratral (moiety) functions and privileges, is absolutely independent in government, succession, inheritance and territory, and besides the phratral (moiety) crest common to all, assumes others that are fully as prominent and often more in evidence.

Geographically considered, there are sixteen tribal divisions known as kwans, a contraction of ka (man) and an (land lived on or claimed). Of these several tribes the Chilkat-kwan has been the most prominent since our acquaintance with Alaska. The relative importance of a primitive people measured by an abundant food supply, natural resources and geographic position as to favorable trade conditions was fully satisfied in their case. In their country about the end of Lynn Canal, with its two river systems flowing from lakes, the spawning beds of countless salmon furnished a nutritious and limitless staple food which was augmented by various other sea fish and seal in the inlets; bear, goat and smaller mammals on the land; and exhaustless berry patches on the mountain sides. Their commanding position at the head of the inland channels controlling the mountain passes to the interior, gave them a monopoly of the fur trade of the upper Yukon Valley, and the placer copper fields of the White River region.

As they looked to the sea for their principal food supply, their villages were directly on the shore just above the high water mark, in sheltered coves where they could land and launch their canoes in any weather and any stage of the tide. But the Chilkat, differing from all of the other Tlingit, lived just beyond the open water, in a rather restricted territory, on rivers that were veritable storehouses of food, bringing their abundance of fish life to their very doors, and so permitting them to remain at home throughout the year, except when on their trading trips to the interior, which gave their habitations a more permanent character, and contributed to the unity of communal life.

The village lies at the edge of a gradual slope on the north bank of the Chilkat, twenty miles from its mouth, where the swift current concentrated in a single channel forms a strong eddy that permits the landing of canoes at any stage of the river. The houses in a single and double row follow the trend of the shore for upwards of three quarters of a mile, but far enough back to allow for the smoke houses, fish drying frames and canoe shelters, and in the rear are the grave houses.

The houses of the four resident totemic families are grouped about that of the chief for mutual protection, giving the appearance of three separate villages, as the two centrally located families through increase of numbers, have been brought into closer union. In each group the houses of the aristocracy and those of the poorer classes are of like construction, differing in size, strength of material, interior apartments, and ornamentation.

Of the five totemic families that form the Chilkat-kwan, not including a sixth subdivision, four are resident here, while individuals of the others through intermarriage are scattered through the village but without house standing. The traditions of all of these speak of a migration from the southern border northward through the inland channels.

The sole representative of the Raven party is the Kon-nuh-ta-di (G̲aanax̲teidí) with which this paper deals. Their legendary history, so imaginary and interesting, is closely associated with the wanderings and antics of "Yéil," the Raven creator, while the earliest family traditions are centered about the south and west coast of Prince of Wales and contiguous islands.

The personal names more frequently refer to Raven, their most honored crest, as they claim to be the first family of this phratry, and it is the more conspicuously displayed on the totemic headdress and ceremonial paraphenalia. They claim and use a great many other emblems as the whale, frog, wood-worm, silver salmon, hawk, moon, starfish, and in their house carvings and painting they illustrate the hero deeds and conquests of their ancestors in their early struggles with mythical animals and supernatural beings.

It was an old custom, but rather a privilege claimed by the chiefs and house masters of the aristocracy, to give names to the communal houses upon their dedication, after the walls were up and the roof was on, when those of the opposite phratry (moiety) who had assisted in the construction were feasted and compensated.

The highest and most honored names thus given, were those of the totemic emblem, or referring to some particular feature of the crest figure, as "Raven house," "Brown Bear house," "Eagle Nest house," "Killer Whale dorsal fin house," etc. Other names meaning less were those of position, shape, material, etc., as "Point house," "Box house," "Bark house," "Drum house," "Big house," "Lookout house," etc. In any case a name once given survived the mere structure. It was a dedication of the site and without any further ceremony belonged to all future houses built thereon.

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The Old Whale House

By George T. Emmons, 1916

History

When I first visited Kluckwan in 1885, the old communal houses of the Kon-nuh-ta-di (Gaanaxteidi) were still standing, the principal one of which, that of the hereditary chief, Youhg-it, "Whale house" was in the last stages of decay and was uninhabitable, although the interior fittings were intact and it was still used upon festival occasions. It was unquestionably the most widely known and elaborately ornamented house, not only at Chilkat, but in Alaska. It occupied the site of much older houses and it is claimed much larger ones.

Architecture

It is said to have been built by Kate-tsu about or prior to 1835 and stood in the middle of the village. It represented the best type of Tlingit architecture, a broad, low structure of heavy hewn spruce timbers, with noticeably high corner posts, that gave it a degree of character wholly wanting in the larger houses of the Vancouver Island people. It faced the river with a frontage of 49 feet 10 inches and a depth of 53 feet which was approximately the proportions of Tlingit houses large and small. The four broad, neatly finished corner posts and the intermediate ones on the sides and back were mortised in length, to receive the ends of the wall planks of spruce or hemlock that were laid horizotally along the sides and back, while the front was formed by two heavy bed pieces placed one above the other extending across the front, dove-tailed into the corner posts, and reaching to the height of the door sill, cut out along the upper edge to receive the lower ends of the broad vertical planks that extend to the roof and fitted under corresponding grooves in the cornice cappings that in the rear of the corner posts were notched and grooved to fit in the post. It will thus be seen that the old houses formed a solid structure, the frame and planking supporting each other without the use of spikes. the doorway, that was the only opening in the walls, was approached by two steps over three feet above the ground. It was narrow and low as a defensive measure, so that but one could enter at a time, and then only in a stooping posture equally impossible for attack or defense. The roof covering consisted of a confusion of overlapping spruce boards and slabs of bark that originally had been held down by smaller tree trunks extending the depth of the structure and held in place by heavy boulders at the ends. The smoke hole in the center of the roof which both lighted and ventilated the interior had been protected by a moveable shutter balanced on a cross bar resting on two supports so that it could be shifted to either side as desired.

House Interior

The interior formed an excavation four feet nine inches below the ground level, with two receding step-like platforms. The lower square floor space 26 feet by 26 feet nine inches constituted the general living and working room common to all, except that portion in the rear and opposite the entrance, which was reserved for the use of the house chief, his immediate family and most distinguished guests. This was the place of honor in all Tlingit houses upon all occasions, ceremonial or otherwise. The flooring of heavy, split, smoothed planks of varying widths extended around a central gravelled fireplace six feet by six feet and a half, where all of the cooking was done, over a wood fire which also heated the house in winter. In front of and a little to the right of the fire space entered by a small trap door in the floor barely large enough to admit a person, was a small cellar-like apartment used as a steam bath, by heating boulders in the nearby fire, dropping them on the floor below with split wood tongs, and pouring water upon them to generate the vapor when the bather entered and the opening was covered over.

The first platform extending around the main floor at an elevation of 2-3/4 feet, comparatively narrow, with a width of 2-1/2 feet along the sides and slightly more at the ends, served both as a step, and a lounging place in the daytime, and that in front, broken by the steps descending from the doorway, was utilized for firewood, fresh game, fish, water baskets, and such larger household articles and implements as were in general use. The retaining walls of this platform consisted of four heavy hewn spruce timbers approximately 27 feet long, 3 feet wide and 5 inches thick, and so fitted with mortise and tenon at opposite ends that they supported each other without artificial fastenings. The faces of these timbers were beautifuly finished in the finest adze work, and those on either side and at the back were carved in low relief to represent a remarkable extended figure, neither wholly human nor animal, with widely outstretched arms and legs, painted in red. It may be that the artist conceived and executed this form merely as a decorative feature, without meaning, or if it was his purpose to present a recognizeable figure he followed that characteristic and well established privilege of native art in exaggeration to make the subject conform to the decorative field. The old chief, Yeil-guou, "Raven's slave," said that the figure symbolized "Kee-war-kow," the highest heaven where those who were killed in war and died violent deaths went, and are seen at play in the Aurora Borealis.

The upper and broader platform, rising two feet above that below, was at the ground level and was floored with heavy planks. It had a depth of ten feet on the sides which was greatly increased at the back and correspondingly diminished in front. The four heavy retaining timbers forming the walls and supporting the platform were thirty-one feet at the front and back and thirty-three feet along the sides, two feet wide, and five inches in thickness, and were fitted together at the ends as previously described and shown in the house plans. On the carefully adzed face carved in low relief, equidistant from the corners and from each other, arranged in echelon, were three representations of the "Tinaa", the ceremonial copper and in connection with this it may be noted that one of the names of the house was Tinda-sarta "Keeper of the copper." This platform constituted the sleeping place of the inmates.

Living Arrangements

Each family occupied a certain space according to number and relative importance, the poorer members being nearer the door. The spaces were separated from each other by walls of chests, baskets and bundles containing the family wealth in skins, blankets, clothing, ceremonial paraphernalia, and food products. On the walls were hung weapons, traps, snares, and hunting gear. Cedarbark mats covered the floor over which was laid the bedding consisting of pelts of the caribou, mountain sheep, goat, and bear, and blankets of lynx, fox, and squirrel, which in the daytime were ordinarily rolled up for economy of space. Sometimes these chambers were partly enclosed by skins or old canoe sails. The back compartment occupying the space between the two rear interior posts was partitioned off by a very beautiful carved wood screen which will be described later. This was the chamber of the chief and his immediate family.

Decoration

At the level of this upper platform, firmly embedded in the ground equidistant from the sides and nearer the front than the back wall, were four vertical elaborately carved posts "gaas" nine feet three inches high and two feet six inches wide which supported the roof structure. The heads were hollowed to receive two neatly rounded tree trunks almost two feet in diameter extending from front to rear, on top of these at intervals were placed heavy cross bars which in turn supported two smaller rounded longitudinal beams placed that distance towards the center that would give the necessary pitch to the roof, lighter cross pieces spanned these, on which rested the ridge pole in two sections to allow for the smoke hole.

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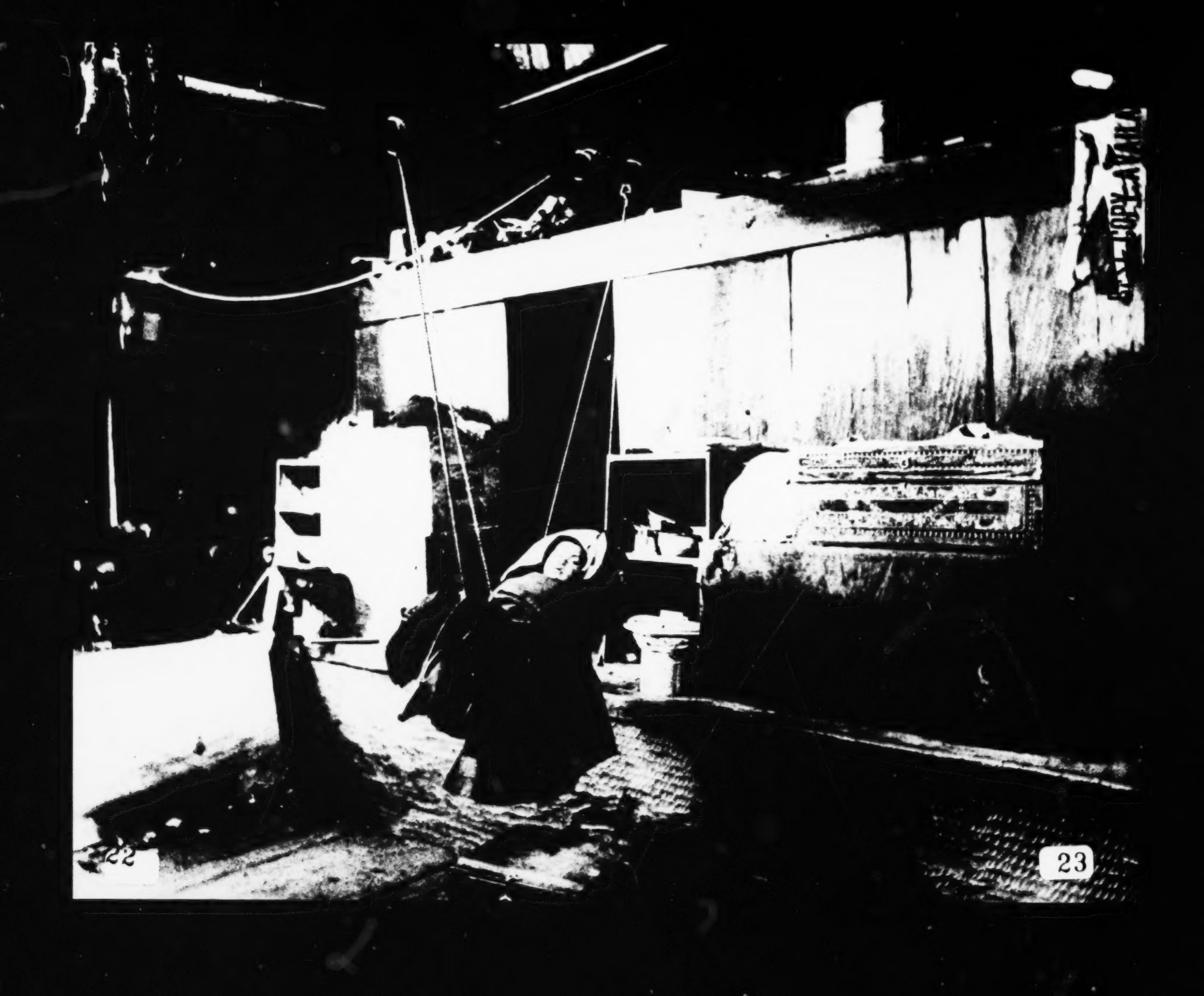


Inside the Whale House

The illustrations included in this model are based on Emmon's description of the interior of the Whale House in 1885. Also shown in the drawings are examples of household activities and conditions typical at that time.

The doorway, framed by two carved posts, is centered at the front of the house. Other than the smoke-hole in the roof, this small opening was the only entrance. To the left, a fishing net and fishing spears are stored against the wall. Firewood is stacked along the first landing and a spruce bough covered with herring roe is hung from the ceiling beam to dry. To the right of the door, a bear hide is hung on the wall. Animal furs were often used for wall coverings, clothing, blankets and bed rolls.

Dried and smoked salmon chunks are strung from the cross-beam above. Salmon, halibut, black cod, eulachon and other fish were usually dried and smoked on racks outside and then stored in the house in boxes or hung up on racks from the ceiling beams.

Two spruce root baskets filled with fresh water are shown on the lower landing. Spruce root baskets are water-tight and can be used in cooking or as storage containers for anything from berries to drinking water. The right side of the packet shows a woman cooking at the central fire pit as her child sleeps in a fur-lined cradle. She is using wooden tongs to remove hot rocks from the fire. To remove the soot, the hot rocks are dipped in a small bentwood box filled with water. Then they are placed into a bentwood box or spruce root basket with water and food. As the hot rocks heat the water, the food is cooked. An iron pot is also shown hanging above the fire. Iron pots were not available until the fur traders appeared along the coast.

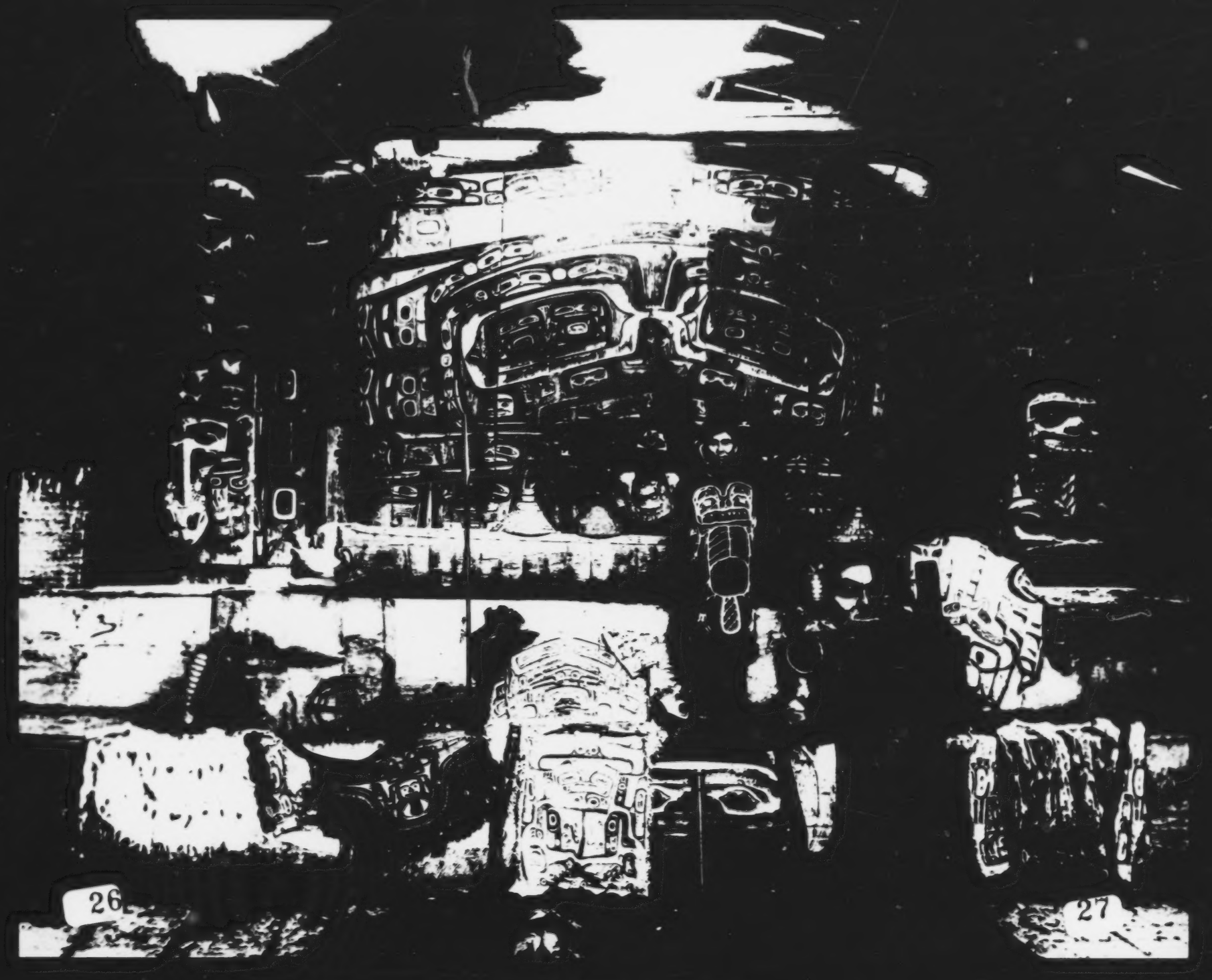
On the upper level, separate sleeping apartments are sectioned off with split wood panels, draped hides and cedar bark mats. Boxes, chests and baskets are stored in and above the sleeping area. Between the ceiling beams a pole has been strung with smoked eulachon or "hooligan" fish. This view also shows how the central living area is actually excavated below the ground level.

The opposite side of the packet shows a woman sitting before her loom as she weaves a Chilkat blanket. The blanket's design is based on the pattern board which sits on the landing above. The weaver also uses a small cedar bark template to determine the shape and size of parts of her design. A basket of bark templates and yarn balls is set to the side of the loom. This type of loom allows the long warp yarn to hang free but it is gathered in bags made of Mountain Goat intestines for protection. These bags also separate the warp yarn into vertical sections for weaving.

Upon the wall above the weaver a completed Chilkat Blanket is shown for comparison. Normally a blanket like this would be carefully stored in a bentwood chest unless worn in a ceremony. The large basket shown to the right of the weaver is also an important clan crest symbol. Known as the Mother Basket, it is said to represent an early event in the Gaanaxteidi family history. This basket was used as a food container at important feasts and ceremonies.

Another type of weaving is shown in the cedar bark mats which are used as door coverings and room dividers in the sleeping area.

The back of the house shows the "Rain Wall" which encloses the living area of the house leader and his family. This end of the house was considered the most important as it provided a focus for the speeches, dancing, singing and feasting that made up the Whale House celebrations.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Séew X'éeni– "The Rain Screen"

At the far end of the house, between the two house posts, a large wall of red cedar planks encloses the private dwelling of the chief clan spokesman and his family. The entire front surface of this wall is painted and carved in low relief. This wall is a very important clan crest symbol for the Gaanaxteidi clan as it represents their close ties with Raven. This wall is called Séew X'éeni, or Rain Screen, and includes the figure of Raven with his arms or wings outstretched. Below Raven's large head, his body is open to allow entrance to the room behind. Around the sides, in Raven's eyes and along the formlines, a crouching figure is repeated to represent the character of raindrops. The raindrop figures shown around the sides are called Séew-con-nutchee, "Raindrops splash up." This represents the splash of the falling drops after striking the ground. According to Martha Willard, an elder of the Klukwan Gaanaxteidi, the raindrops are combined with Raven in this painting to show that Raven's actions and presence in the world are felt by all. "Just as the rain falls on all things alike, so too are the effects of Raven's adventures felt by all the world."

From the Old Whale House description recorded by G.T. Emmons at Klukwan and from an interview of Martha Willard, Chilkat Elder, in Klukwan. The interview was recorded in Tlingit and translated by Anna Katzeek, Tlingit Elder.

There are many stories represented in the Rain Screen. They tell of Yeil, "Raven", and his adventures in the early days of the world. In each of these stories Raven changes or rearranges the world in some way. These changes are always to Raven's advantage but they usually benefit the people as well. Raven can assume different forms. He often appears as human but he can quickly change back to a bird when it suits his needs. He is always a trickster and often appears greedy. But within the oral tradition of Alaskan Natives, he is considered the most important benefactor and friend of the people. The following story shows how Raven's trickery changed the world.

Raven Brings Fresh Water to the Land.

During Raven's journey he came to an island where Gánu'k, "Petral" kept the everlasting spring of water. Raven wanted this water because there was no other fresh water to drink in all the world but Petral would not allow anyone near it. He was keeper of the water and guarded it constantly. At night he would cover the water and sleep next to it to protect it for himself. Knowing all this, Raven decided to trick Petrel. He entered Petrel's house and said, "My brother-in-law, I have just come to see you. How are you?" He told Petrel of all kinds of things and events that were happening outside, trying to induce him to go out and look at them, but Petrel was too smart for him and refused to leave his house.

That night Raven said, "I am going to sleep with you, Brother-in-law." So they went to bed but toward morning Raven heard Petrel sleeping soundly and he quietly went outside and brought back dog manure. While Petrel slept he put the manure all over Petrel and his bed. Then he woke Petrel saying, "Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Brother-in-law, you have messed all over your clothes." Petrel got up, looked at himself and thought it was true. So he took his blankets and went outside. Then Raven quickly went over to Petrel's spring, took off the cover and began drinking as much as he could. After he had drunk up almost all of the water, Petrel came in and saw him but Raven flew straight up towards the smoke hole, crying, "Ga" (just for Raven). Before he could get through the smoke hole, however, Petrel called, "My Spirits of the Smoke Hole, catch him!" So Raven stuck there and Petrel put pitchwood on the fire below him to make more black smoke. Before that, Raven had always been white, but the smoke from Petrel's fire changed him to the black color you find him today. Still, he did not drop the water he held in his beak and when the smoke hole spirits let him go, he flew up and as he flew along he dropped water here and there. Each time he dropped water, it became the rivers, lakes and streams we see today. Raven announced, "This thing that I drop here and there will whirl all the time. It will not overflow the world, yet there will be plenty of fresh water." First he let some water fall from his beak and made the Nass River. By and by he spit some more and made the Stikine River. Next he spit out the Taku River; then the Chilkat; then the Alsek and all the other large rivers. He also dropped water for the lakes and the small drops that came out of his beak made the small salmon creeks. In this way, Raven brought water to the land.

From Tlingit Myths and Texts *recorded by John R. Swanton, 1909.*

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Yéil-Gáas' – "Raven Post"

The carved post on the right of the Rain Screen is named Yéil-Gáas', "Raven Post." It tells the story of the capture of T'á, "the king salmon." The main figure shows Raven in human form holding a head by the ears. The head, with its protruding blade-like tongue, represents S'oow x̲ut'aa "jade adze." At the bottom is the head of a fish which represents T'á "the King Salmon." Coming out of the mouth of Raven is a bird form called Tu-kwut-lah-Yéil "telling lies Raven", which symbolizes the lies that Raven told to the little birds in this story.

Raven, King Salmon and the Jade Adze

It was in the early spring, the season of little food, before the salmon had come into the rivers or the berries had ripened on the mountain sides. Raven happened to be on the seashore at Dry Bay and he was very hungry. Suddenly he saw T'á, the king salmon jumping out in the ocean. Raven wanted to catch the king salmon but he had neither canoe, spear, nor fishing line. Walking back from the shore he discovered a deserted camp site where he found a woven cedar bark mat, an old woven spruce root hat, a complete eagle skin and a large jade adze called S'oow x̲ut'aa. Raven disguised himself by putting on the Eagle skin, wrapping the cedar bark mat around his body, dressing his hair with Eagle down and by wearing the spruce root hat. He took the jade adze and returned to the seashore where he set the adze upright on the beach and sat down on a large boulder. Then Raven called out to the king salmon who was again jumping in the water near shore. "S'oow x̲ut'aa (the jade adze) is calling you bad names. He says that you have an ugly black mouth and that you are afraid to come up to the shore."

This so enraged T'á that he came towards the shore but Raven remembered that he had no club and that a salmon must always be killed by striking it on the head with a club. Raven called out to the king salmon, "Wait a little, I have to go into the woods." He quickly found a club and concealed it under his cedar robe as he returned to the beach. When he returned, he again angered the king salmon by calling out to him the insults that he claimed were made by the jade adze. This so enraged the king salmon that he came to shore and jumped into a shallow tide pool, where Raven quickly killed him with the salmon club.

Raven then kindled a fire with his rubbing sticks and prepared the fish for cooking. While he was doing this many small birds gathered around him hoping to get something to eat. Raven offered to share his salmon with the birds if they would help him cook it. They agreed and he sent them off to gather skunk cabbage leaves to wrap the salmon in while cooking. When they returned he told them that the leaves they brought were too small and smelled bad and he told them to go to the far mountains where the proper kind of skunk cabbage grew.

As soon as they disappeared he wrapped the salmon in the skunk cabbage leaves that he had rejected, scraped away the fire and the gravel beneath it, buried the salmon, and covered it with hot stones and the fire. When the salmon was cooked he uncovered it from the fire and ate it all. He then collected all the bones and carefully wrapped them in the old leaves and again covered them with the fire.

When the little birds returned with the skunk cabbage leaves they had gathered on the far mountains, Raven uncovered the salmon bones and claimed that the fire had eaten all the meat. All of the little birds felt very badly; the little chickadee cried so bitterly that as he continually wiped his eyes with his feet, he wore away the feathers and ever after a white stripe has shown on the chickadee's cheek. The blue jay became so angry that he tied up his feathers on top of his head which is why the blue jay has had a crest ever since. The robin was so sad that while he was lost in his grief he sat too close to the fire and burned his breast red. This is how the Tlingit tradition of tying one's front hair up in a knot and painting one's face to show anger or grief was first started.

From the Raven Post story collected by G.T. Emmons at Klukwan.

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Tlúkwx̲-aas-a-Gaas'– "Woodworm Post"

The carved post to the left of the Rain Screen is named Tlukwx̲-aas-a-Gáss' or "Woodworm Post." The Woodworm Post represents a very important happening in the early life of the Gaanax̲teidí clan. In fact, the clan name, "Gaanax̲" is derived from the location of their original home site on Beam Canal and the Woodworm Post tells the story of how they came to move north up Lynn Canal.

The large upper figure on the post represents Ka-kutch-an, "the girl who fondled the woodworm." The figure she holds in her hands represents Tlúkwx̲-aas-a, the woodworm. Tlúkwx̲-aas-a is also represented above the girl's head as two woodworms whose heads also form her ears.

The lower figures on the post represent a frog in the bill of a crane. The whole post is said to represent the tree in which Woodworm lives.

The Girl and The Woodworm

It is said that in the early days, in a village near Klawock, on the west coast of Prince of Wales Island, lived a chief of the Tlow-on-we-ga-dee, clan with his wife, who was of the Gaanax̲teidí clan. They had a daughter who was just coming of age as a young woman. At this point in a young Tlingit woman's life she would often remain secluded in a private room until the day she came of age.

One day after members of the household had returned from gathering firewood, Ka-kutch-an (the chief's daughter) picked up a piece of tree bark in which she found a small woodworm. She wrapped the woodworm inside her blanket and carried it into the house. After the evening meal she took the woodworm into the back compartment and offered it food, but it would not eat anything and seemed about to die. Ka-kutch-an wanted to save the woodworm so she nursed it like a baby. The woodworm grew very rapidly and Ka-kutch-an became very fond of it, as if it were her own child. As time went on her whole life became absorbed by her affection for her pet woodworm, but she kept it hidden in her room where no one could see it. As time passed, the woodworm grew to an enormous size and it became harder for Ka-kutch-an to hide it. At night it crawled about the village through the tunnels it had dug and ate the dried fish and oil that the people had stored for winter.

Eventually the young woman's mother began to get suspicious about her daughter's constant absence and one day she visited her daughter in her private room. There she found her fondling the woodworm, Tlúkwx̲-aas-a, which had grown as large as a person. As she held the woodworm Ka-kutch-an sang:

"They have small faces.
Sit down here.
They have small fat cheeks.
Sit down here."

Her mother called the chief and they both became very upset as no one had ever seen or heard of such a thing before. They summoned her uncle and he also observed the woodworm when Ka-kutch-an was away from her room.

That evening the uncle called all the people of the village together. He told them that his niece had been keeping a large creature. He explained this "Kutze-ce-te-ut" was responsible for all the food missing from the food boxes over the last year. He convinced them that if they did not kill the woodworm it would soon kill them all.

The following day Kakutch-an was invited by her aunt to come and sew her marten skin robe. While she was away the men sharpened their long wooden spears and went to the room where they found the huge woodworm behind the food chests. Together they attacked and killed the woodworm. Upon her return Ka-kutch-an cried bitterly. She claimed they had killed her child and began to sing the woodworm song. She sang night and day until she died. Her family was very sad about her death and soon left the area and moved north, some to Kluk-wan. To commemorate this event, the Gaanax̲teidi adopted the whole woodworm figure as one of their clan crests. The Tlow-on-we-ga-dee clan also adopted the woodworm as a clan crest but only the tail, as that is the part they attacked when the woodworm was killed.

From the Woodworm Post story collected by G.T. Emmons at Klukwan.

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Dukt'ootl' Gáas'–"Black Skin Post"

This housepost represents the story of the famous Tlingit hero, Dukt'ootl'. The event took place in a village on the west coast of Prince of Whales Island before the Gaanax̲teidí moved north.

The human figure at the top of the post represents Dukt'ootl', "Black Skin" tearing a Sea Lion in two. The large head at the base symbolizes the rock island on which the story takes place. The sea lion's intestines are wrapped around the neck of Dukt'ootl'. The sea lion forms the central figure. His protruding tongue represents death as the body is split in half. The sea lion's fore flippers are carved parallel with the body under the man's forearms and the back flippers are shown in front of his shoulders.

Dukt'ootl'

It is said that in the early days of the Gaanax̲teidí clan there lived a young man known as Dukt'ootl', "black skin." At that time the villagers depended upon the meat from the sea lion for their food. They used the sea lion hide for armor or protective clothing and the sea lion's whisker bristles were greatly prized for the crown of the ceremonial headdress.

There were many sea lions to be found on a rocky island far to seaward, but the ocean passage by canoe was very dangerous. It also took great courage and strength to succeed in the hunt as the hunters must face the large sea lions with only spears and clubs. To prepare for the trip, each hunter exercised hard and practiced long and hard with the weapons. Each morning before the Raven awoke, the men would bathe in the cold sea water to harden their bodies and discipline themselves for the dangerous task ahead. After bathing the men would test their strength by attempting to pull up and break small trees. All through the cold winter the hunters followed this hard preparation in the hopes that strength would come to each of them. Everyone except a young man known as Dukt'ootl'. Even though he was the chief's nephew and the largest man in the village, it seemed Dukt'ootl' was just weak and lazy as he slept in late by the fire pit and was never seen to practice or to bathe. He became the laughing stock of the village and even the children made fun of him. A powerful man named Kash-ka-di lived in the same house as Dukt'ootl'. Each day as Kash-ka-di went for his early morning plunge in the cold sea water, he would kick Dukt'ootl' and call him Atkahaas'i, "nasty man." Dukt'ootl' never showed anger or resentment of this treatment, but his uncle, the chief, was ashamed of him.

The chief and the rest of the village did not know that Dukt'ootl' was only pretending to be lazy. Each night after everyone had gone to sleep he would sneak out and sit in the ice cold water for hours. After he came out of the cold sea water he would beat himself with bundles of brush to keep up his circulation and toughen his skin. When he returned to the house he would throw a little water on the hot coals of the fire to make steam, wrap himself in his bark mat and would then lie down in the ashes to sleep. As he slept the ashes would cover his body which is how he got his nickname.

One night while he was sitting in the ice cold water he heard a strange whistle sound and saw a large heavily built man rise up out of the sea. This large man told Dukt'ootl' to get up and then he whipped him four times on the back. Each stroke of the whip knocked Dukt'ootl' to the ground. Then he gave Dukt'ootl' the sticks and told him to whip him. Dukt'ootl' whipped him hard but the large man didn't seem to feel a thing. Then he said "You have not gained strength yet" and returned to the water. Each night the man returned and the whipping was repeated until one night they wrestled with each other, but neither one could throw the other to the ground. The strange man said, "Now you are very powerful; I have given you my strength." Suddenly a heavy fog drove in from the sea and as it surrounded the man he disappeared. Then Dukt'ootl' ran about and broke the limbs off the trees with very little effort as he had become very strong. Then he put all the limbs back on the trees where they froze in place, as he did not want anyone to know that strength had come to him.

The next morning, after coming out of the water, Kash-ka-di tested his strength by attempting to pull the great limb from the tree. He did not know that Dukt'ootl' had already broken it the night before and when he pulled it apart easily he thought that strength had come to him. He announced this to the village and told everyone that he was ready to go out against the sea lion. Dukt'ootl' said that he would go too, which made everyone laugh. Even the young girls made fun of him and asked what good he thought he could do on the hunt. He meekly answered that he would bail the canoe, which was child's work.

Dukt'ootl' prepared for the hunt by washing off the soot and ashes and putting on new, clean clothes. Then he painted his face with red paint to show anger but the people still laughed at him even though he now looked like an important chief.

As the canoe reached the sealion island, Kash-ka-di jumped out and attacked a great sealion. He grabbed it by its hind flippers and tried to tear it in two but he was not strong enough. Suddenly the great sealion flipped him high into the air and Kash-ka-di died as he landed on the rocks. Then Dukt'ootl' said "Who broke the great tree? I broke it." He jumped from the canoe, ran across the rock, grabbed the great sealion and ripped it in half. Then he attacked the other sea lions, swinging them by their hind flippers against the rocks. As he caught and killed each one, he wrapped the intestines around his head. All the other hunters loaded the sea lion carcasses into the canoe. They were all amazed and afraid of Dukt'ootl', as they now realized that he was truly strong and that they had been wrong to ridicule him. When they returned home with the great catch of sea lion, Dukt'ootl' was honored as a brave and powerful man and his image has been a clan symbol of discipline, courage, strength and respect ever since.

From the Black Skin Post story collected by G.T. Emmons at Klukwan.

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Gunakadeit Gáas'–"Sea Creature Post"

The carved housepost to the right of the doorway is known as Gunakadeit Gaas'. This post represents an episode from the adventures of Raven and the famous sea creature Gunakadeit. Gunakadeit is shown on the post as the main figure holding a whale by its flippers with its tail in his mouth. Gunakadeit is shown here catching the whale as this represents an important part of the Gunakadeit story. The figure of a woman carved on the whale's back represents Stax-adi. She is included to represent the Yakutat Clan associated with this story.

Inside the round blowhole on the Whale's head we see the face of Raven. This represents the story of Raven in the belly of the whale. Also shown at the top of the post is Gunakadeit Yadi, "Gunakadeit's child," who is holding the head of a hawk in its paws. The hawk is shown as a crest symbol of the clan while the carving of Gunakadeit Yadi represents the legend of the Daughters of the Creek. This legend states that Gunakadeit's daughters became the Old Women who live at the head of every stream and are responsible for the yearly return of the salmon.

From the Gunakadeit Post Story collected by G.T. Emmons at Klukwan.

The Origin of Gunakadeit

In a village near Yakutat lived a young man who had come from an important clan of a neighboring village. The young man's mother- in-law also lived with them but she considered her son-in-law lazy and constantly ridiculed him for his gambling. She called him a "worthless fellow," and finally, for the sake of peace, he built himself a hut near a lake behind the village. The young man had heard of a creature that lived in the lake so he took his stone axes, split open a tree and made a trap. He baited the trap with salmon and soon killed the creature. Then he carefully skinned the creature, crawled into the skin and entered the lake where he found to his surprise that he could swim about under the water like a fish. He also found a water passage from the lake to the sea where he could swim out to catch fish.

He told his wife about the sea-creature skin and his new-found power, but made her promise not to tell anyone, especially her mother. He told her that he must always return home from the sea before the Raven called in the early morning, or he would die.

Soon after this, famine struck the village and the people began to starve. The young man, in his sea-creature skin, swam out and caught a salmon and then left it by his mother-in-law's door where she found it that morning. She brought it in and told everyone that she had caught it for the clan. The next day she found two salmon and the next a halibut and each time she claimed that she had brought these fish to the clan. Even though she continued to ridicule him, the young man would bring her more fish each night until one morning she looked out her door and found a huge whale pulled up on the beach. She filled many boxes with meat and whale oil and sold them to the villagers, boasting all the time that she was a great and powerful shaman and that she alone could provide more food. It had been very hard for the young man to capture and return with the whale and again he warned his wife that he would die if he did not return before the Raven called in the early morning.

Sometime later, the young man swam out in his Gunakadeit skin and captured two whales. It was very hard to swim back to shore with the two whales. After working all night, he finally dragged them onto shore. Just as he dragged them to his mother-in-law's house, the Raven called and he fell to the ground dead, still inside the Gunakadeit skin.

When the woman came out she found the two large whales lying there with the huge creature between them. It had two fins on its back, long ears and a very long tail. All of the people came to see and said to one another "There is a terrible creature there. Come down to look at it. It is something very strange." When the young man's wife came out, she began to weep and cry loudly as she realized her husband had died. This surprised the villagers and they looked at her and wondered, "What does this chief's daughter mean by calling the creature her husband?"

Then the girl saw her mother and said: "Where are your spirits now? You are a story teller. You say that you have spirits when you have none. That is why this has happened to my husband. Mother, is this your food-finding spirit? How is it that your spirit could die? If this is your spirit make it come to life again."

Then the girl went close to the creature and said to the village, "Some of you that are very clean come and help me." Her husband had died in the act of holding the jaws of the creature apart to come out. When the people saw this they were very much surprised and said "He must have been captured by that creature."

The villagers helped to take the woman's husband and the creature skin up to the edge of the lake and put them into the hollow tree where he used to hide the skin. There they found the split log, hammers and wedges lying about. When they repeated this to the people, the whole village came out to see how the young man had killed the Gunakadeit. The old woman became so ashamed that she went into her house and stayed in her room until she died, bleeding from the mouth.

Every evening the dead man's wife went to the foot of the burial tree and wept. One evening, however, she saw a ripple on the water, and looking up she saw the Gunakadeit flopping around in the lake. Then the creature said to her, "Come here. Get on my back and hold tight." It was her husband's voice so the young woman climbed on as Gunakadeit swam down to his beautiful house beneath the water. From that day on the sea creature was called Gunakadeit and is considered to bring good luck to anyone who sees him. His wife also brings good luck to those who see her, as do their children, "the Daughters of the Creek" who live at the head of every salmon stream.

From the Origin of the Gunakadeit, recorded by John R. Swanton at Wrangell in 1904.

Person

Person: Haida–Nang; Tlingit–Lingit; Tsimshian–Gyet
Ovoid head, no ears, eyes not in ovids, distinctive eyebrows, usually shown with human hands.

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Clan Symbols

Haida—Gwaayk 'aang, Tlingit—Du Shúká, Tsimshian—Pdeext

The Haida, Tlingit and Tsimshian people share some important cultural traditions. Their spoken languages are quite different and yet the oral tradition of song and legend is part of the heritage of every Native community along the Northwest Coast. It is through these legends that each family or clan tells the story of their beginning, history, beliefs and how they received their clan name.

Northwest Coast Artwork is also based on clan legend as almost every example of painting, carving, weaving, song or dance represents a particular person, supernatural being or event taken from the clan stories. Northwest Coast Indian Art represents a symbol or visual record of each clan's heritage.

The art or visual symbol which is most important to the clan is the clan crest. The clan crest represents the name and unique history of each family and is intended to be prominently displayed. The clan crest can be found painted, carved or designed on almost any material object. This can include objects used in everyday activities but usually the clan crest is found on ceremonial objects that are intended to be shown and used on important occasions when guests from other clans are present. Objects intended for ceremonial use often include carved and painted chests, boxes, bowls and spoons; woven clothing, hats and dancing blankets; or carved masks, staffs and rattles. The clan crest is also displayed in or on the community house and is often the subject of house posts and Totem poles.

While each clan has its own stories, they also share the legends and heritage of broader family groups or social divisions. Among the Tlingit there are two main groups; the Raven and the Wolf (Eagle in the North). The Haida also have two main social groups; the Raven and the Eagle while the Tsimshians are divided into four major social groups: Raven, Eagle, Wolf, and Killer Whale.

A member of the Kiks.ádi (Frog) clan at Sitka, for example, belongs to the Sitka branch of the Kiks.ádi clan which is a subgroup of the Tlingit Raven moiety. We call the Raven group a moiety because it represents one of the two divisions of the Tlingit. The other moiety or division of the Tlingit is the Wolf (Eagle in the North). This person has inherited the property, rights and legends of both the Sitka Kiks.ádi (Frog) clan and the larger Tlingit Raven moiety (division). They have also inherited the right to use the artforms which represent Frog and Raven heritage including the clan crest. When the clan crest is used in art, decoration or dress, it identifies the person who is displaying it as a member of the clan.

This packet includes six examples of clan crest designs which represent Raven, Eagle, Wolf, Killer Whale, Frog and Bear. Also included are brief descriptions of the important characteristics usually included in these clan crest designs.

Raven

Raven: Haida–Yaahl; Tlingit–Yéil; Tsimshian–Ganhada
Long straight beak, ears, usually shown with tongue, often including round shape in mouth which represents the sun.

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Wolf

Wolf: Haida–Guuts; Tlingit–Gooch; Tsimshian–Laxgibuu
Long nose with flared nostrils, many large teeth, long straight tongue, large ears, claw-like feet, a long curved tail.

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Eagle

Eagle: Haida–Tsaak; Tlingit–Ch'aak'; Tsimshian–Laxsgiig
Short, curved beak, ears, straight tongue, usually shown with wing design.

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Bear

Bear: Haida–Hoots; Tlingit–Xóots; Tsimshian–Ol
Large flaring nostrils, a wide mouth with large teeth, ears, protruding tongue, claw-like hands and feet.

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Killer Whale

Killer Whale: Haida–Sgaan; Tlingit–Kéet; Tsimshian–Gispawitwada
Round, ovoid head, short round nose, large mouth with many teeth, prominent blow hole, usually shown with dorsal fin and long tail with flukes.

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Frog

Frog: Haida–Hlkyaan Kustaan; Tlingit–Xíxch; Tsimshian–Ganaw
Large, long mouth with thick lips and no teeth, tongue usually protruding from mouth, legs with toed feet bent in, no ears and no tail.

Beaver

Beaver: Haida–Tsang; Tlingit -Sigeidee; Tsimshian–Stsool
Large ears, rounded nostrils, large mouth with teeth, two large incisor teeth in front, always shown with a large flat tail; tail is usually cross-hatched.

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